



CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

2418 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
8425 WEST 3rd STREET

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90048

202-225-3976
213-651-1040

Washington Report
by HENRY A. WAXMAN
Congressman, 24th C.D.

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BEWARE OF REAGAN DOUBLE-TALK ON AWACS

When Congress reconvenes this week, Washington will be flooded with mumbo jumbo, double talk, technical talk, contradictory talk and baseless talk about just what the sale of AWACS-equipped aircraft to Saudi Arabia will mean for the Middle East in general and for Israel in particular.

Though the heavy-scale bombardment of Congressmen is yet to come, the themes have already been established through a wide assortment of "information" carefully leaked by the Administration to the press.

The centerpiece of the new Reagan Administration "inside information" is an "agreement" supposedly negotiated over the last several months between the United States and Saudi Arabia on the AWACS sale.

It is important to note that this "agreement" is not in writing, was not witnessed by any newsmen, and is guaranteed by no named officials -- either American or Saudi. There is absolutely no way for Israel or Israel's friends in the United States to verify the alleged provisions.

Now to the agreement. The Saudis supposedly have agreed to allow U.S. technicians to keep track of the AWACS activities. Remember, after an initial training period the planes themselves will be flown and maintained by Saudis.

Even if there is such an agreement, I deem it of no value. The American technicians will undoubtedly become sympathizers of the Saudis and willing collaborators on surveillance projects which seem to them of value. In general, American military and diplomatic personnel assigned to Arab countries have an infamous record of becoming apologists and even agents for the government of their host countries.

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The most ridiculous provision of the invisible agreement stipulates that the Saudis will use their AWACS in areas other than the sensitive northwest region of their country proximate to Israel and Jordan. This flatly contradicts previously stated Reagan Administration policy.

According to Administration spokesmen, the Saudis are to have their own AWACS rather than rely on American AWACS now stationed there as a matter of "national pride". How can we possibly reconcile this concern for national pride with an agreement under which the Americans tell the Saudis just where they can and where they cannot fly their own AWACS planes?

During the days to come we are going to hear a lot of technical talk about how the AWACS the Saudis are getting are not the really terrific top-notch AWACS that they originally ordered. Citizens and Congressmen with little technical background are going to be told that the computers have reduced capacity, that the "data-linked communications system" has been replaced with an inferior voice-communications arrangement, etc., etc. The Saudis are not about to pay several billion dollars for a gismo they could put together themselves with parts from Radio Shack. Changes or no changes, AWACS delivered to Saudi Arabia -- if that unfortunate event should take place -- will have an awesome power to survey both land and air, and to provide lethally valuable strategic data and command.

AWACS in Saudi hands, regardless of the details or even the existence of an agreement with the United States to limit their use, could permanently tip the balance of military power against Israel. I do not believe that there is any argument that would justify taking this risk.

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